

## Forces

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# The Big Book of Virtues

Randy Scarborough

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"By then I thought / I must find out / How men were truly men. What meant courage, where lay honor, why did heroes make their stands?" Stories in answer stirred imagination. It was me who carried the warning of approaching peril. It was me at the rudder while others peacefully slept. It was me who fought for the weak and innocent. In my thin armor I defended all in need with justice on their side.

In maturing, I left Aesop to sit bewildered before "Ozymandias." But before I collapsed below the Theban colossus, I stood with "Horatius at the Bridge." I was one of the "happy few" who heard "Henry's Speech at Agincourt." "The Little Steam Engine" I deserted for "Robert Bruce and the Spider." And I was spell-bound by Churchill's, "We Shall Fight in the Fields and in the Streets." The toy soldier of "Little Boy Blue" succumbed to "The Story of Cincinnatus" and the "Concord Hymn." The tales fed my mind and were as much of me as growing bone and muscle. All accompanied me into manhood.

The readings began again when I became a father. Then it was at this knee where the little children sat. As they grew, they also spent their rainy days in stories ever new. Now they are men and women. For two years I have had a grandson. He will be read to. His father called me recently and said, "I want a copy of the book, that anthology, for my birthday. I think it's The Book of Virtues by William Bennett. It's recently out; you showed me your copy-the one that has the fables and the stories in one volume." I responded, "You shall have it."

When I read the stories now, I need to take down just one book. How different from when I was a boy. I can have Bronte, Bulfinch, Defoe or Dickinson, and Faulkner's in there, too. I scan the chapters to determine my interest: Compassion, Courage, Responsibility, Honesty, Loyalty, Faith, and others. I can read Donne or Chuang-tzu, Jefferson or Wollstonecraft, Bacon or even Frost. I am no longer cowed by "Ozymandias." But as often as not, I'll choose the one about the gingham dog and a calico cat or a tale about a little tin soldier.

## The Big Book of Virtues that Wasn't a Book 'Til Now

Randy Scarborough

*I heard them at my mother's knee,  
I still have not forgot;  
The virtues gently played therein,  
The lessons that they taught.  
Then I read them to myself  
As often as I sought,  
To while away a rainy day  
In pleasures that they brought.  
Then, when eight or maybe ten,  
Or twelve, it might have been,  
I picked them up and sat me down  
And read them all again.*